The increase in the rate of obesity and related health problems across the general population is an alarming trend, and the fact that these trends disproportionately impact the food insecure highlight the need for action by communities and policy makers. Access to quality, affordable fresh foods at local markets, coupled with nutrition education, are critical first steps to combat obesity and its consequences.

What is Being Done?
Federal food assistance programs constitute the most important safety net to protect American households against food insecurity, since these programs are intended to provide a buffer against household hunger. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food stamps to low-income individuals and households. SNAP is the largest program designed to mitigate food insecurity among low income households. Because SNAP participation is based on family size, income, and state rules, food stamp benefits can’t be quickly increased to help people who suddenly need more food. However, SNAP eligibility includes those who are elderly, and disabled food stamp participants in the Restaurant Meals Program to assist homeless, receiving food stamps. Opportunities to reach eligible people currently not based and faith based organizations offer excellent applications at nontraditional sites, such as health care providers or local food banks. DPSS also continues to conduct outreach with various groups such as consumer groups and special interest groups.

What More Can Be Done?
Reducing the rate of food insecurity over the long term requires programs and policies that increase employment opportunities, wages, and access to healthy and affordable foods. Reducing comparing costs through the expansion of health insurance coverage and affordable housing will also help to improve food security in the country.

Annual federal and state legislative and budget decisions directly affect participation in the nutrition safety net programs. Policymakers must make reducing hunger a priority. Congress is in the process of debating the Farm Bill, which includes a “Nutrition Title” that authorizes funding for many federal nutrition programs. This bill provides the best short-term opportunity to increase funding and improve access to these programs.

Local food stamp programs also provide resources to help reduce food insecurity. Local food stamp programs serve as a critical link between eligible households and federal food assistance programs. However, local food stamp programs must be able to effectively reach and enroll eligible households.

In this issue:
Food Insecurity Increasing in Los Angeles County

The Los Angeles County Health Survey is a periodic, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. The 2005 survey is the third since 1998, and represents a major expansion of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health’s Food Security Monitoring Program. The program was expanded to include the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which monitors food insecurity nationally, introduced new terminology in its reports beginning with 2005. As a result, the new terms have been introduced, the methods to assess household food security status have changed. Data from before and after the terminology change are comparable. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity with hunger and food insecurity with very low food security. This report describes results from the 2002-03 and 2005 Los Angeles County Health Surveys (LACHS), which indicate that food insecurity is increasing in the county, while food insecurity within households at very low food security levels is decreasing. This report provides a more detailed analysis of the 2005 LACHS data, which identifies the extent and characteristics of food insecurity in Los Angeles County.

Acknowledgments: Special thanks to Michael Flood (LA Regional Policy Council) for his input, and to Jeff Dronkers (LARFB) and Margaret Shih, MD, PhD for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review. Thanks to Advocates (for their helpful review.
income households, or 182,000 homes, experienced very low food security in 2005—a significant 29% increase from 2002.

### Rise in Food Insecurity Found in Poorer Areas

- The increase in food insecurity was greatest among households living below 100% FPL.
- Food insecurity also increased among those living between 100%-199% FPL, but not among those with incomes between 200-299% FPL (Table 1).
- From 2002-2003, a statistically significant increase in food insecurity was observed in the households of Latinos compared to the households of whites, but not in households of African American or Pacific Islander respondents.

### Current Food Insecurity Disparities

- In 2005, the percent of food insecure households among foreign-born Latinos was significantly higher in the South and East Service Planning Areas (Figure 1).

### Food Security Trends Among Households of Foreign-Born and U.S.-Born Latinos

- In the households of U.S.-born respondents (24%), 34% were insecure. Food Insecurity is Associated with Obesity

- The rate of obesity was higher among food insecure households (37%) than those who met the current demand for food assistance.

- Food insecurity increased in California and in the U.S. overall. The paradoxical and most concerning consequences of food insecurity is obesity. The higher rate of obesity observed among low and very low food security adults in the 2005 CHIS surveys.

### Insecurity Among Households <300% FPL With and Without Children by FPL

- The percent of food insecure households among those with incomes between 200-299% FPL (10%)

### Discussion

Food security is one of the necessary conditions for a population to be healthy and well-nourished, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The literature highlights the increasing link between low income populations to current economic pressures. It is also notable that foreign-born Latinos, and recently-arrived immigrants in particular, demonstrated a particularly high prevalence of low and very low food security. In addition, Latino subgroups experienced the greatest increase in food insecurity in low and very low income families between 2002-2003 and 2005. One explanation for this finding is that the economic pressures faced by LA County residents may be particularly burdensome to the families of immigrants from Mexico and Central America who may be the most recent foreign-born and Spanish-speaking LACHS respondents. The observed increase in food insecurity in the communities closest to the expectation of the survey workforce that food assistance and food insecurity data—characteristics that distinguish food assistance need to and food insecurity need to the demand for help has increased while food supplies have decreased. The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank estimates that sufficient commodities received from the USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program have decreased from 24 million pounds in 2002 to 12 million pounds in 2006. The Foodbank has attempted to fill that gap by providing more food to local food banks and vegetables, which is helpful in providing clients with access to fresh produce that they may not be able to afford to purchase. However, food pantries and soup kitchens report that they are an increasing number of people that can no longer afford to meet the current demands.

14 H. Feldman and colleagues, “California Nutritional Needs and Resources Assessment.” Los Angeles Regional Foodbank, 2006. 14. This study was based on the assumption that food assistance programs were unable to meet the current demand for food assistance. The percent of food insecure was highest among food insecure adults in the 2005 CHIS surveys.

- One of the paradoxical and most concerning consequences of food insecurity is obesity. The higher rate of obesity observed among low and very low food security adults in the 2005 CHIS surveys.

- These data from the LACHS suggest that food insecurity and obesity are major public health concerns in LA County, with over 25% of households earning less than 100% FPL. The rate of obesity was higher among food insecure households (37%) than those without children (21%).

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**Rise in Food Insecurity Found in Poorest Households**

The increase in food insecurity was greater among households living below 100%-199% FPL than among those with incomes between 200%-299% FPL (Table 1). From 2002 to 2005, a statistically significant increase in food insecurity was observed in the households of Latino respondents who were foreign born (21% vs. 7%) and in households of African American or Asian/Pacific Islander respondents. Food insecurity also increased among households of the white born, but this increase was not statistically significant.

**Very Low Food Security in 2005**

In 2005, the percent of food insecure was significantly higher in households of Latino respondents (32%), and significantly lower in households of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents (13%), than in households of African American or white respondents (24% and 17%, respectively).

Among Latinos, a significant higher level of food insecurity was observed in the households of foreign-born respondents (27%) than in those of U.S.-born respondents (24%).

Similarly, more Latino respondents who completed the interview in Spanish experienced food insecurity in their households (37%) than did those who completed it in English (23%).

The percent of food insecure was higher among households in the South (35%) in 2005 than in the Midwest (28%).

Households With Children Are Most Severely Affected

The increase in food insecurity observed by the LACHS was limited to those living in or near poverty (below 200% FPL), and was most pronounced among those living in the City of Los Angeles, 17% of the average income households (approximately 60% of the national)

As gas prices and public transportation fares rise, transportation costs consume an increasing proportion of household income. For households experiencing low food security, any increase in basic expenses (such as public transportation or utilities) pushes additional pressure on the household budget, increasing the likelihood of food insecurity.

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**Food Insecurity and Health**

Food insecurity is associated with obesity and overweight. These data from the LACHS suggest that food insecurity is associated with obesity, a major public health concern, in LA County, with over 25% of households earning below the poverty level, those with children in the home, and those who are unemployed and looking for work—food insecurity prevalence is alarmingly higher.

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income households, or 182,000 homes, experienced very low food security in 2005—a significant 29% increase from 2002.

**Rise in Food Insecurity Found in Poorest**

The increase in food insecurity was greatest among households living below 100% FPL. Food insecurity also increased among those in households of African American or Asian/Pacific Islander respondents (13%), than in households of African American or white respondents (24% and 17%, respectively). Among Latinos, a significantly higher level of food insecurity was observed in the households of foreign-born respondents (34%) than in those of U.S.-born respondents (24%). Similarly, more Latino respondents who completed the interview in Spanish experienced food insecurity in their households (37%) than did those who completed the interview in English (21%). The percent of food insecurity was higher among households in the South SPA (35% in 2005) than in other SPAs.

Households With Children Are Most Severely Affected

The increase in food insecurity from 2002-03 to 2005 was greatest for households with children than those without children (23%). In 2005, the percentage of food insecurity was significantly higher among households with children (30%) than those without children (21%). Household with children and with incomes below 100% FPL had the highest level of food insecurity of any group (44%) (Figure 3).

**Trends in Food Insecurity Among Households <300% FPL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Planning Area</th>
<th>2002-03 FPL</th>
<th>2005 FPL</th>
<th>Insecure</th>
<th>95% CI Insecure</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Insecure</th>
<th>95% CI Insecure</th>
<th>Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Bay</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>19.3 - 26.0</td>
<td>66,000</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>21.6 - 30.2</td>
<td>77,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>20.4 - 27.8</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>28.8 - 37.4</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>12.2 - 22.6</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>11.1 - 25.2</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>23.7 - 31.1</td>
<td>76,000</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>24.7 - 33.0</td>
<td>81,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Gabriel</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>15.5 - 21.0</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>15.7 - 22.6</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Employment Status Impacts Food Insecurity of the Household**

In 2005, 21% of households reported being employed, 24% were not employed working because of a disability (44% food insecure). Among households whose respondents reported being employed, 24% were food insecure.

Food Insecurity is Associated with Obesity

The rate of obesity was higher among foreign-born Latinos (21%) than among adults who were food secure (23%); rates of overweight were similar (34% among food insecure and 35% among food secure).

**Income and Employment of the Household**

In 2005, the percent of food insecure was significantly higher in households of Latino respondents (32%), and significantly lower in households of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents (13%), than in households of African American or white respondents (24% and 17%, respectively). Among Latinos, a significantly higher level of food insecurity was observed in the households of foreign-born respondents (34%) than in those of U.S.-born respondents (24%).

Discussion

Food security is one of the necessary conditions for a population to be healthy and well-nourished, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.** The data from the LACHS suggest that food insecurity remains a major public health concern in LA County, with over 25% of households earning below <100% FPL, 25.3% between 100% -199% FPL, 20.5% between 200-299% FPL, and 16.8% between 300% -399% FPL.

LA County, with over 25% of households earning below <100% FPL, 28.9% between 100% -199% FPL, 21.5% between 200-299% FPL, and 7.4% between 300% -399% FPL.

**TABLE 3**

LA County, with over 25% of households earning below <100% FPL, 28.9% between 100% -199% FPL, 21.5% between 200-299% FPL, and 7.4% between 300% -399% FPL. Comments added are for clarification purposes:

- The increase in food insecurity among Latinos occurred in the households of foreign-born Latinos, very low food insecurity and foreign-born respondents (Figure 2). Among households, the highest level of food insecurity was observed in the households of foreign-born respondents (34%) than in those of U.S.-born respondents (24%). Among Latinos, a significantly higher level of food insecurity was observed in the households of foreign-born respondents (34%) than in those of U.S.-born respondents (24%).

- The increase in food insecurity also varied geographically and was most pronounced among households in the South and East Service Planning Areas.

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The increase in the rate of obesity and related health problems across the general population is an alarming trend, and the fact that this trend is disproportionately impacting the food insecure highlights the need for action by communities and policymakers. Access to quality, affordable fresh foods at local markets, coupled with nutrition education, are critical first steps to combat obesity and its consequences.

What is Being Done?

Federal food assistance programs constitute the most important safety net to protect American families against food insecurity. These programs include the School Breakfast Program, the supplemental program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and Food Stamps. The Food Stamp Program is the largest program designed to mitigate food insecurity among low income households. Because eligibility for these programs is not tied to specific families, these programs do not use food stamp benefits, increasing food stamp participation among eligible households, according to the most recent research.

More can be done in the context of the Countywide Food Stamp Outreach Campaign in 2005. This plan provided outreach efforts at each of 26 Department of Public Health community health centers and 23 Los Angeles Unified School District school sites. Cigarette and alcohol use, as well as physical inactivity, also contribute to the epidemic of obesity. In 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACHS) have focused on the opportunity to increase funding and improve the food environment in California. The Los Angeles County Health Survey is a periodic, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. The 2005 survey results indicated that 20.5% of households and 25.6% of school districts are focused on providing more low income students with free breakfast and lunch. Research has demonstrated that participation in breakfast and lunch programs at school improves student health and provides a buffer against household food insecurity.

What More Can Be Done?

Reducing the rate of food insecurity over the long term requires programs and policies that increase employment opportunities, wages, and access to healthy and affordable foods. Reducing competing costs through the expansion of health insurance coverage and affordable housing will also help to increase food security in the country.

In fact, federal and state legislation and budget decisions directly affect participation in the nutrition safety net programs. Policymakers must make the right decisions to address this crisis. Congress is in the process of drafting the Farm Bill, which includes a “Nutrition Title” that authorizes funding for many federal nutrition programs. This bill provides the best short-term opportunity to increase funding and improve access to these programs.

Today, the Food Stamp Program provides only $1/person/meal, so even families and individuals receiving food stamps will struggle to maintain their food security even if they have enough income to purchase food. To address this problem, funding for food stamps, and the amount of food stamps per household, should be increased.

Furthermore, Los Angeles County health districts administer student nutrition programs, and therefore play an important role in reducing food insecurity. School districts can take a range of actions to increase consumption of nutritious foods as students are heading back to school, from offering nutritious foods to teaching students about healthy eating.

In this issue: Food insecurity Increasing in Los Angeles County

Introduction

Despite an abundant food supply in the United States, many households experience food insecurity, an indicator of household poverty. In 2003, Los Angeles County’s 1 in 6 households faced food insecurity, a greater proportion than the 1 in 7 households counted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Despite an abundant food supply in the United States, many households experience food insecurity, an indicator of household poverty. In 2003, Los Angeles County’s 1 in 6 households faced food insecurity, a greater proportion than the 1 in 7 households counted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which monitors food insecurity nationally, redefined food insecurity to be a household that does not have sufficient resources to acquire adequate and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs of all household members. This new term is intended to focus attention on household financial resources and the adequacy of food consumption rather than on the presence of food shortages. In 2003, food insecurity in the United States was estimated at 1 in 7. LA County’s food insecurity rate is unknown. According to the 2003 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS), which was completed in 2005, food insecurity is frequently associated with obesity in adults, in part because less expensive foods tend to be more calorie-dense, and access to healthy food is limited in many low income communities. In the elderly, food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which increases morbidity and mortality. In children, food insecurity increases the risk of obesity and related health problems.

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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For additional information about the L.A. County Health Survey, visit: lapubhealth.org/ha
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What More Can Be Done?
Reducing the rate of food insecurity over the long term requires programs and policies that increase employment opportunities, wages, and access to healthy and affordable foods. Reducing competing costs through the expansion of health insurance coverage and affordable housing will also help to improve food security in the county.

Annual federal state and legislative budget decisions directly affect participation in the nutrition safety net programs. Policymakers must make reducing hunger a priority. Congress is in the process of drafting the Farm Bill, which includes a “Nutrition Title” that authorizes funding for many federal nutrition programs. This bill provides the best short-term opportunity to increase funding and improve access to these programs.

Currently, the Food Stamp Program provides only about $1/person/meal, so even families with very low food security experience a food shortage that reduces the amount of food stamps per household, should be increased. Local and state districts administer student nutrition programs, and therefore play an important role in reducing food insecurity. School districts can take a range of actions to increase consumption of nutritious foods as well as access to nutritious foods serving breakfast, lunch, or both, and to adjust schedules to ensure all children have sufficient time for meals.

daped myths and misconceptions by clarifying food stamp eligibility rules. Advertisements in English and Spanish were printed in newspapers, posted on MTA bus placards, and aired over the radio. Numerous other efforts are underway to provide families with nutrition assistance to bridge the gap between low wage work and food security. School districts, including Los Angeles Unified, are focused on providing more low income students with free breakfast and lunch. Research has demonstrated that participation in breakfast and lunch programs at school improves student health and provides a buffer against household hunger.

In this issue: Food Insecurity Increasing in Los Angeles County

The Los Angeles County Health Survey is a periodic, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to services among adults and children in the county. The 2005 survey was conducted for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health by Field Research Corporation and was supported by grants from First in LA, Tobacco Control Prevention Program, and California Department of Public Health. The 2005 Los Angeles County Health Surveys (LACHS) was conducted for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health in 2005.

This report describes results from the 2002-03 and 2005 Los Angeles County Health Surveys (LACHS), which indicate that food insecurity is increasing in the county. The estimates from the 2002-03 LACHS are based on an estimated 471,000 households living below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) experiencing food insecurity with or without hunger. Food insecurity is frequently associated with obesity in adults, in part because low income foods tend to be more calorie-dense, and access to healthy food is limited in many low income communities.1 In the elderly, food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which encourages disease, increases disability, decreases resistance to infection, and extends hospital stays.2 This paper describes results from the 2002-03 Los Angeles County Health Surveys (LACHS), which indicate that food insecurity is increasing in the county.

For additional information about the L.A. County Health Survey, visit: www.lapublichealth.org/haisub/index.aspx

Food Insecurity Increasing in Los Angeles County

Introduction
Despite an abundant food supply in the United States, many households experience food insecurity, an economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Food insecurity is an important public health issue with wide-ranging adverse effects on health and well-being across the life span. Those who live in food insecure households are more likely to have poor diets that can lead to nutrient deficiencies and acute and chronic diseases, and often remain in a poverty trap.3,4 Among children, food insecurity can impair growth and development and has been associated with poor school performance.5 In adolescents, food insecurity is associated with chronic stress and increases risk for depression and other mental health problems.6 Food insecurity is frequently associated with obesity in adults, in part because low income foods tend to be more calorie-dense, and access to healthy food is limited in many low income communities.1 In the elderly, food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which encourages disease, increases disability, decreases resistance to infection, and extends hospital stays.2

Food Insecurity Terminology

In 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which monitors food insecurity nationally, introduced new language to describe levels of food insecurity. These terms have been introduced, the methods to assess household food security status were updated. In this report, the terminology change is applied. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively.

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Food Insecurity Increasing in Los Angeles County

Introduction
Despite an abundant food supply in the United States, many households experience food insecurity, an economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Food insecurity is an important public health issue with wide-ranging adverse effects on health and well-being across the life span. Those who live in food insecure households are more likely to have poor diets that can lead to nutrient deficiencies and acute and chronic diseases, and often remain in a poverty trap.3,4 Among children, food insecurity can impair growth and development and has been associated with poor school performance.5 In adolescents, food insecurity is associated with chronic stress and increases risk for depression and other mental health problems.6 Food insecurity is frequently associated with obesity in adults, in part because low income foods tend to be more calorie-dense, and access to healthy food is limited in many low income communities.1 In the elderly, food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which encourages disease, increases disability, decreases resistance to infection, and extends hospital stays.2

Food Insecurity Terminology

In 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which monitors food insecurity nationally, introduced new language to describe levels of food insecurity. These terms have been introduced, the methods to assess household food security status were updated. In this report, the terminology change is applied. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively. The terms low food security and very low food security have replaced food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger, respectively.